

Faculty Forum

Volume 5, Numbers 1-8 and Responses (1992-1993)

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What Does--or Could--Make Western Unique?

The FCTE Steering Committee has chosen the theme "What Makes WCU Unique?" as the focus for Center activities this year. "Unique," of course, may seem a large boast if we take it literally to mean one of a kind. Western is probably similar to many, if not most, of the 3,000 colleges and universities around the country. So the question of uniqueness is raised, not with the implication that we are already distinctly different from everyone else, but as an invitation--and a challenge--to think about our potential for developing a distinctive identity.

If you were a big name consultant brought in to size up WCU's circumstances and recommend a focal point for developing an institutional identity over the next decade, what would you emphasize? Do you suppose there is anything that a majority of WCU faculty and administrators might rally around as a point of pride? If you don't have an immediate answer to these questions, mull them over for awhile. Ask your colleagues for their thoughts along this line. Between now and next May, we'd like to air as many opinions as possible, not only through the *Faculty Forum*, but also in discussions involving students, faculty, and administrators.

To prime your critical thinking pump, here are a few points for your consideration:

1. For decades, WCU has emphasized its beautiful setting as a distinguishing asset. To what extent is it true that our setting makes us unique? If it does make us unique, how significant is this singular quality? Does our unusual and beautiful setting have a positive educational effect on our staff, faculty, and students? In the future, will this emphasis be necessary or sufficient for our sense of identity?
2. In the last few years, WCU has also advertised itself as a "community of scholarship." To what extent would this make us unique? Has it helped to define who we are? Has it changed the ways in which the university does its business? If the answer to any of these questions is "no," could this focus still be useful? How?
3. The Faculty Center has attempted to magnify pride in teaching excellence on campus. Does our practice justify our pride? Assuming that, collectively, we are pretty good if not outstanding teachers, can we claim a special niche in higher education for our commitment to teaching excellence? Are there ways in which some aspects of our commitment to teaching **is** unique?
4. Recent books such as *Profscam* and *Impostors in the Temple* present a

scathing criticism of university faculty. To what degree, if any, are we different from the self-centered, irresponsible academics described in these books? Can we shout "Not Guilty!" in a unified chorus?

5. The interactive feature of the **Faculty Forum** may be one thing that makes Western unusual if not unique among universities in the United States. Campus publications focused on teaching issues have proliferated in the last few years, but all I have seen are one-way communication; they go from the editor's desk to faculty mailboxes without any feedback loop. Like some of our professional journals, circulation may be large while readership is minuscule. But when you send in a response to a colleague's written opinion, whether you agree or disagree, you are participating in a rare and perhaps unique interchange. It is a public display of our willingness to share our opinions with one another, of our sincere commitment to teaching and the welfare of the university, of our determination to find a system of shared goals and values.
6. It is customary, of course, to assert that Western has a three-pronged commitment in teaching, research, and service. But such a claim certainly doesn't make Western unique--nearly everyone claims it. However, if we can convincingly demonstrate that we actually pull it off, we surely would have something to brag about! Is this an area that deserves more attention?

These and many other questions about how we define ourselves lead to the question of whether or not what we do is unique. If we can discern what makes us special, we can then ask how we solidify and perpetuate that uniqueness. Who are the key people who make this uniqueness possible? Are these people sufficiently aware of their role in maintaining our uniqueness or must they and/or other people be approached, engaged, or even more clearly rewarded for what they do?

This year, I would like to devote every issue of the **Faculty Forum** to the question of WCU's uniqueness. Over the summer I interviewed some of our administrators on this question, and I am anticipating some insightful, provocative opinion pieces from them. But we need to hear from a good cross-section of faculty. Hopefully, the campus community will discover aspects of WCU that can help us forge a stronger sense of identity and purpose for the years ahead. As we discover what is unique about Western, we may also discover that much of what we do is not unique but is still worth doing well and worth adding to the list of characteristics that most clearly define us. As we focus on the next century in Cullowhee, we certainly want to be as good as we can be.

Terry Nienhuis, English, FCTE

•••••••**Editor's Call for Responses**•••••••

If you would like to respond to this opinion piece, please send your comments either to Terry in English or at the FCTE. Please indicate whether you are willing to be quoted or prefer to remain anonymous.

Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

Response to "What Does--or Could--Make WCU Unique?"

Faculty Forum article by Terry Nienhuis, 9/1/92

We received only one written response to this month's opinion piece, but it was so thorough, thoughtful, and provocative that we decided to print the complete text as next month's Forum article. To whet your appetite, here are a few excerpts from the forthcoming piece by Bruce Henderson.

I remember when a big name consultant came to Cullowhee and recommended a series of foci WCU could use for establishing an institutional identity and developing a strategy for making do in difficult times. George Keller, author of Academic Strategy, . . . suggested that an analysis of WCU's physical setting, strengths and weaknesses, and history indicates a need to focus on at least three areas: (1) teaching, (2) natural resources, and (3) ruralness.

Keller argues that. . . we must make self-conscious decisions to stress some things at the cost of others. . . . Despite extant inequalities throughout the campus (in faculty salaries, teaching loads, allocation of equipment funds, etc.), faculty members and administrators seem to be frightened by the idea of putting strong emphasis on particular programs. If they manage to do well, fine, but let's not radically change budgets, build faculties, or reallocate space to build "steeples of excellence". . . . Instead, let's allow a kind of social-academic darwinism take hold and see what happens.

If we are ever going to be truly unique, I think we are going to have to develop programmatic steeples of excellence that capitalize on our circumstantial strengths and weaknesses. Some programs are going to have to receive lots more resources and some are going to have to receive fewer, or even disappear.

What about the "community of scholarship" rubric as a base for our uniqueness? . . . Being a community of scholarship is different from being a community of scholars. In a community of scholars, each member does his or her own thing and looks for recognition and reward for doing so. . . . In a community of scholarship, there is two-pronged emphasis on quality that has to overcome the relativism, often disguised as academic freedom, that says whatever a faculty member does, inside or outside his or her classroom, is alright.

. . . Our existing standards for quality teaching have failed miserably in stamping out poor teaching. . . . Given the nature of the students we serve and the differences between a comprehensive university and either a research university or a liberal arts college, we have to begin to make some hard decisions, as a community, about how we spend our limited time and financial resources.

Indeed we are guilty of many of the excesses outlined by recent critics. Individualism and relativism have led us away from helping our students develop intellectually. Yet, we are not more self-centered or irresponsible than any other academics. We are just academics doing what academics have done for most of the last century. If we want to be different, even unique, we will have to make the shift from being a community of scholars to being a community of scholarship.

Bruce Henderson, Psychology

What Does--Or Could--Make Western Unique?

Reading the first **Faculty Forum** created a sense of déjà vu for me. I remember when a big name consultant came to Culloowhee and recommended a series of foci that WCU could use for establishing an institutional identity and developing a strategy for making do in difficult times. George Keller, author of Academic Strategy, read our publications and made suggestions that at least at that time made extraordinarily good sense to me. I don't have notes from his visit and my recollections are clouded by a number of experiences I have had since then, but I recall that Keller suggested an analysis of WCU's physical setting, strengths, weaknesses, and history that indicated a need to focus on at least three areas:

1. **Teaching.** WCU's history as a teacher's college and the existence of NCCAT and FCTE (both new at the time) suggested that we could become a center of expertise on teaching, from preschool through university levels.

2. **Natural resources.** With our physical location, we could build on strong academic bases programs in natural resource management, parks and recreation, and related areas .

3. **Ruralness.** Again, our location, history, and the existence of CIML suggested that many disciplines could serve as foundations for programs related to rural activities (rural education, rural businesses, rural health, etc.).

One could point to a number of campus activities that are indicative of some moves in the directions highlighted by Keller (including the FCTE and Faculty Forum). However, I think we could have done and should do much more to make ourselves unique. My subjective assessment of why we have not done more than we have is related to Keller's central concept of academic strategy: steeples of excellence. Keller argues that if an institution is to survive in the difficult climate faced by higher education, we must make self-conscious decisions to stress some things at the cost of others. My experience here has been that there is considerable resistance to the concept of steeples of excellence. Despite extant inequalities throughout the campus (in faculty salaries, teaching loads, allocation of equipment funds, etc.), faculty members and administrators seem to be frightened by the idea of putting strong emphasis on particular programs. If particular programs manage to do well, fine, but let's not radically change budgets, build faculties, or reallocate space to build steeples. That might damage the esteem of the programs that are not made steeples. Instead, let's allow a kind of social-academic Darwinism take hold and see what happens.

We have had some guidance in recent years on general goals for WCU (e.g., quality, image, enrollment, funding), but these are not likely to make us unique or build on any existing uniqueness. I suspect that most colleges and universities want to have quality, increase or stabilize enrollment, have a good image, and increase funding. If we are ever going to be truly unique, I think we are going to have to develop programmatic steeples of excellence that capitalize on our circumstantial strengths and weaknesses. Some programs are going to have to receive lots more resources and some are going to have to receive fewer, or even disappear.

What about the "community of scholarship" rubric as a base for our uniqueness? I believe the development of a community of scholarship is necessary to ensure the quality of whatever we do in teaching, research and service. Along with the rest of American culture in the 80's and 90's, we in the university are plagued by the twin trends toward individualism and relativism. The former leads to a breakdown in community and the latter has led to a breakdown in scholarship.

But being a community of scholarship is different from being a community of scholars. In a community of scholars, each member does his or her own thing and looks for recognition and reward for doing so. The hope is that the institution will look good because of the quality of the contributions made by individuals. This leads to an emphasis on cosmopolitan activities in the individual's discipline and the quest for status. It leads to turf-guarding, competition for resources, privatization and burrowing toward tenure among junior faculty, status-seeking through grant-getting, publication, attaining external accreditation, and a fear of the steeples of excellence concept. In the right atmosphere and context, some of these activities in and of themselves are not bad. However, without a countervailing community ethos, they are centripetal forces.

In a community of scholarship, there is two-pronged emphasis on quality that has to overcome the relativism, often disguised as academic freedom, that says whatever a faculty member does, inside or outside his or her classroom, is all right. First, a wide variety of activities do need to be recognized and rewarded in a multi-dimensional fashion. Faculty are valued because they are vital, not because they follow an inappropriate research university ideal that stresses only disciplinary and cosmopolitan activities. However, in my vision of a community of scholarship, all these activities, whether they be cosmopolitan or local, are continually evaluated against standards. The good news of acceptance of diversity has to be balanced by the sharp edge of critical community evaluation. Unfortunately, we have done a poor job on standard development.

The discussions of academic standards at WCU last year indicate to me that our existing standards for quality teaching have failed miserably in stamping out poor teaching. Students described teachers who read from textbooks in class, who fail to meet their classes, who offer poor advisement, who require little intellectual work, who are not current in the subjects they teach. Moreover, we have hardly begun to develop critical standards of quality (as opposed to quantity) in research and service activities. For example, faculty members on tenure and promotion committees and department heads often haven't read the publications they consider so important and haven't checked with the recipients of the faculty service or the quality of scholarship involved in that service. Furthermore, in a community of scholarship, we have to

link what we do to our overall mission. Given the nature of the students we serve and the differences between a comprehensive university and either a research university or a liberal arts college, we have to begin to make some hard decisions, as a community, about how we spend our limited time and financial resources.

Individualism and relativism have led us away from helping our students develop intellectually, and we are guilty of many of the excesses outlined by recent critics of higher education. We are not more self-centered or irresponsible than any other academics--we are just doing what academics have done for most of the last century--but if we want to be different, even unique, we will have to make the shift from being a community of scholars to being a community of scholarship.

Bruce Henderson, Psychology

•••••Editor's Call for Responses•••••

If you would like to respond to this opinion piece, please send your comments either to Bruce in Psychology or to Terry at the FCTE. Please indicate whether you are willing to be quoted or prefer to remain anonymous.

Living Up To Our Educational Commitments: What Makes Western Unique

My mother from rural Alabama had euphemisms and metaphors (often mixed) to describe almost any situation. One of her favorites--oft used for rebuke as well as affirmation--was, "It's as clear as the nose on your face!" As I attempt to address the question "What is unique about WCU?" my mother's favorite expression comes to mind. Is it as clear as the nose on our face?

My responsibilities for institutional marketing as well as undergraduate admissions, retention, and advising involve me continually in the assessment and identification of those areas which make WCU special or even unique. I also have had the good fortune to serve on Chancellor Coulter's committee to review and rewrite WCU's mission statement. And though I have only been at Western for three years, I have worked at three other very different schools in twenty-one years and believe that I have a perspective on WCU that is enhanced by time and place.

At other places where I have worked, the institution's mission statement and its public persona advanced in marketing and recruitment propaganda were diametrically opposed. And as one would anticipate under such conditions, dissonance ran rampant. Dr. Jekyll would confront Mr. Hyde at faculty meetings, budget hearings, or job searches. We have far less of this dissonance than any other place where I have worked or attended. We continue to debate the teaching versus research issue, but who doesn't? This is a healthy debate that reminds us at WCU of what we long ago settled in our mission statement and advance quite clearly in our public persona. "The most important activity at Western Carolina University is student-teacher involvement in *learning*. ***Students with a wide range of academic abilities and aptitudes may enter the university*** but those who are graduated are expected to be knowledgeable, competent in critical thinking and communications skills, aware of ethical and aesthetic values, and productive in employment and general life settings." This quote from our mission statement describes an institution that elevates the proposition of learning to lofty heights while acknowledging the challenges that accompany such an emphasis. What is unique about WCU? In public, we promote this commitment in ways far too numerous to mention, not the least of which is the forum you are now participating in.

Our mission statement does not neglect the importance of research and service--reference is made to these essential university elements at least five times--but it is clear that research, service, and teaching are framed in a larger context of **learning**, which includes **application of learning**. This emphasis on learning also acknowledges the challenge that we face as a regional university attempting to teach students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. I submit that this latter consideration definitely underlines our uniqueness.

As a former admissions officer and consultant for the College Board, I can safely argue that test scores should not be the sole consideration when we recruit, enroll, and graduate students in concert with our mission statement. We should enroll the very best students available to us, and our mission statement encourages us to enroll not only students who deserve a special opportunity but national merit scholars and students ranking in the top half of their graduating classes as well. Our commitments are the same for that national merit scholar as for that student who seems to be quite average. Our mission statement admonishes us to attract the best students as well as taking a chance on a student who could very well succeed here with assistance and support. I further submit that our unique culture at WCU enables us to deliver on this publicly stated mission. My favorite analogy in this respect is that WCU will take a student who is a 4 and graduate him or her as a 9 1/2. Other schools will enroll a student who is a 9 1/2 and graduate him or her as a 9 1/2 or a 10. Which school has done the better job?

But of course it is one thing to talk about lofty principles such as those articulated in our mission statement and quite another to look into that all-telling mirror to ask if we really measure up. Again, my travels and relative objectivity say that we most certainly and perhaps uniquely do measure up. Lest I sound like a writer under retainer by our Public Information Office, I quickly submit that I have carefully studied the important information assembled by our faculty and staff through our strategic planning process and data generated through our outcomes assessment program. Though space prevents a thorough demonstration in these pages, close attention to such data shows that we live up to the commitments in our mission statement. Granted, some of the assessment data need several years of validation or testing, but so far a synthesis of student impressions tells us the following:

- * WCU is advertised to students as a place where skill development and value clarification is a central feature of undergraduate education, and although students are often not sure what general education is all about before they enrolled, they definitely find that WCU delivers on its promise.

- * WCU is advertised as a place where the external environment emphasizes peace, security, and beauty, and when they get here students find the advertisement to be understated.

- * WCU is advertised as a place where **competent and caring faculty believe in the importance of teaching**, and when they get here students hear over and over again that they should make a friend in the faculty. Some students develop many friends among the faculty.

Across the campus, as we evaluate our assessment information and simply listen to our supporters and competitors, we hear about **a university which lives up to its educational commitments and public persona. This is in itself unique** and should not be discounted. Some of our colleagues denigrate WCU as being ordinary or even substandard as an institution of higher learning. To them I say, look around you. Higher education is changing in this country and WCU is often leading the way in educational reform. Listen to the positive things our young faculty and students generally say about WCU. We have the courage to articulate who we are and who we serve, and this ain't the case everywhere! How are we unique? It's as clear (to me) as. . .well you know.

Mike Malone, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Assistant Professor of Human Services

•••••Editor's Call for Responses•••••

If you would like to respond to this opinion piece, please send your comments **by the 8th of the month** either to Mike at 547 HFR or to Terry at the FCTE. Please indicate whether you are willing to be quoted or prefer to remain anonymous.

Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

Response to "Living Up To Our Educational Commitments: What Makes Western Unique," by Mike Malone, 11/1/92

Pittillo, Berea College, & WCU

I very much enjoyed Mike Malone's opinion piece for November, in part because I feel that I have had personal experiences that corroborate what he claims about WCU. I was an undergraduate at Berea College, an institution with a well-recognized record of academic excellence. However, I feel that I arrived there as a 4 and managed to graduate as a 7 1/2, mainly because I was willing to work hard and had very cooperative and dedicated instructors. When I came to Western in 1966, I noted many students with backgrounds similar to mine and this pattern continues at WCU today. In 1966, I also found in the biology faculty at WCU an attitude and determination toward teaching that was similar to the one I had met at Berea, and I still find that many of our colleagues across the university hold to the same ideals, commitment, and dedication toward students. This is not to take away from faculty efforts and contributions to other areas of research and service, for looking over the accomplishments of the Biology Department bears out these contributions very clearly. So while I might have some reservation about the total uniqueness of WCU, I certainly agree that the real values, though not unique to our institution, are very much a part of what we really are all about.

Dan Pittillo, Biology

Editor's Note

We were delighted to receive Dan's response but disappointed that we did not receive others. We believe very strongly that the response feature of the **Forum** is its truly distinguishing, valuable, and even unique feature. Many institutions have one-way newsletters, but ours, with its potential for public dialogue, seems unique in its attempt to create the possibility of real interchange and community spirit. Do you enjoy reading your colleague's responses? Do you agree that the responses are a valuable feature? Do you have any suggestions for increasing the number of responses so that we have a truly lively dialogue and forum every month? Please send your comments and suggestions to Terry Nienhuis at the FCTE.



On Change and Deep Culture at WCU

Some say that the only thing unique about Western Carolina University is that it is the sole university in the country in a non-incorporated area. I reject that notion. There is no question that we are unique in the true meaning of the word: there is only one Western Carolina University. Our uniqueness is rooted not in any single trait but in a combination of elements such as

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| •our size | •our geographic location |
| •our tradition of caring for students | •our civility in handling disagreements |
| •our valuing of excellent teaching | •our tradition of service to the region |
| •our international outreach and service programs | •the beauty of our campus grounds |
| •our mix of majors | •our tradition of faculty productivity |
| •our particular combination of general education courses | •our desire to build a true community of scholarship |

Like a multi-faceted kaleidoscope, these various elements are indispensable to the unique design which is Western Carolina University at this time in history. There are surely other elements comprising our uniqueness, and a valuable part of our proposed dialogue this year involves modifying a list like this to arrive at a more generally held and agreed upon description of what makes WCU unique. Most if not all of the elements listed above no doubt exist on other campuses, but nowhere do these elements take quite the exact form that they take at Western. However, the elements of our kaleidoscope are about to change substantially, and the resulting pattern will necessarily shift.

We are on the brink of a radical period of change at Western Carolina University, and the extent and nature of the change will be greater than any WCU has experienced since the late sixties and early seventies.

Fact: Within 3-5 years, nearly 33% of our tenured faculty will be eligible to retire.

Fact: Within that same period, we are likely to employ a new Chancellor and at least one new Vice-Chancellor.

Fact: We are currently searching for two new Deans.

Fact: A new organizational entity, the School of Applied Science, has come into existence, replacing two schools, each of which had a fairly long history.

Fact: Western Carolina University will be establishing its first doctoral level program during this time, thus entering a new level of instructional responsibility.

Fact: For the past three years, we have been asked to do more with less (e.g., we have increased our enrollment by 3% in each of the last three years while resources have been restricted). This trend is expected to continue for the foreseeable future.

While all organizations change, most do so slowly and in such a way that they maintain their core identity while integrating changing personnel and programs. However, some organizations experience such massive changes over such a short period that they are hard pressed to accommodate them and are in danger of losing their core identity, their "deep culture." This is especially true of organizations that have not become aware of the factors in their culture that create their uniqueness. E.H. Schein in Organizational Culture and Leadership (1985) has suggested that this "deep culture" operates unconsciously and consists of the *basic assumptions and beliefs* shared by members of an organization. These assumptions are often taken for granted as an organization formulates its view of itself and its environment.

Deep culture operates very much like an individual's unconscious awareness of identity. Though not evident in everyday functioning, the individual's basic assumptions and beliefs, like the organization's basic assumptions and beliefs, greatly influence behavior. Schein points out that organizations pass through stages much like people in their development to maturity. An organization that has matured is one which "knows who it is, what its role in the world is, how to accomplish its mission, and how to conduct its affairs" (p. 206). In the process of reaching maturity, successful members of an organization must become aware of at least some of the elements of the deep culture, just as individuals must understand themselves as deeply as possible in order to function most fully. Finally, Schein also points out that this often unconsciously held deep culture is taught to new members of an organization as the way to respond to any new organizational problems (p. 9). Therefore, if in the next three to five years we will be welcoming a third of the faculty who will be teaching at WCU in the year 2000 as well as new administrative leaders, it is important for us to become more conscious of the basic assumptions that we will be passing on to the generation of academics who will replace many of us who have served this university for the past twenty years or more.

As we embrace the process of becoming more conscious of our uniqueness, what are some of the questions we need to address?

- What are other elements of WCU's "deep culture," what impact do they have on what we do now, and which should we try to keep and pass on to the future?
- How does our geographical location and size affect us?
- How can we solidify and amplify our tradition of caring for students?
- How can we emphasize and perpetuate our valuing of excellent teaching?
- How can we give more support and encouragement for the productivity of our faculty?
- How can we improve our civility in handling disagreements?
- What do we need to do to ensure the quality of our general education courses and mix of majors?
- How can we solidify and amplify our tradition of service to the region?
- How can we improve our international outreach and service programs?

- At what cost should we preserve the beauty of our campus grounds?
- How can we continue to build a true community of scholarship?

We still have most of this academic year to consider such questions and even to consider whether my description begins to capture our uniqueness. Please add your voice to the dialogue through the **Forum**, the activities promoted by the FCTE, and the normal activities within your school, department, and individual contacts with colleagues and students. Questions like these are too important to be left to unconscious processes.

Judy Stillion, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

•••••••**Editor's Call for Responses**•••••••

If you would like to respond to this opinion piece, please send your comments **by the 8th of the month** either to Judy at 557 HFR or to Terry at the FCTE. Please indicate whether you are willing to be quoted or prefer to remain anonymous.

Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

Response to "On Change and Deep Culture at WCU," by Judy Stillion, 12/1/92

John Wades Into the Discussion

Seeking to answer the question, "what is unique about Western?" misses the point as far as I am concerned. Uniqueness is what marketing campaigns stress in order to hook customers on a product. Why do we have this constant need in Cullowhee to keep selling it to ourselves when we are already committed to it?

Presumably we have a mission statement firmly in place. The basic question that needs to be resolved on our campus is: **How do we fulfill our mission?** The answer to this question should permeate campus decisions, for example:

What is our target student body?
How do we best engage our
students in the learning process?
Who do we hire?
How do we reward teaching,
service, and scholarship?
How do we allocate our budgets?
How do we measure the outcomes
of our efforts?

Pushing uniqueness to the forefront of campus debate trivializes more important issues, creating a smoke screen that keeps us from our primary responsibility.

We will become unique when we perform the tasks outlined in our mission statement better than the several hundred other colleges and universities that potential students can turn to for their education. To me, engaging in a campus-wide discussion of uniqueness is not as relevant as a discussion of how we are going to get the job done in the best possible manner. All the tee shirts in North Carolina won't make WCUnique, but getting the job done right will.

John Wade, Economics and Finance

Sharon on Sartorial Assumptions

Of the many other elements in WCU's "deep culture," I have always appreciated that this is not a "dress for success" campus. Individuals at most levels of faculty and staff are accepted for what they do, not for what they wear. This attitude carries over into our acceptance of student variations in dress. I will admit, however, to a certain uneasiness at blue jeans shredded too near the crotch (on either sex).

Sharon Jacques, Nursing



WCU: Size and Vitality in a Unique Combination

As the Dean of the Graduate School, I spend quite a lot of time recruiting graduate students, and I frequently ask myself about what I should say to prospective students to suggest why they should come here rather than go to Appalachian State, UNC-Charlotte, or some other graduate school. In these deliberations, I think I am essentially asking myself, "what makes Western unique," or at least "special." I have decided that what makes us unique is the combination of our size and vitality. We are a relatively small university, but we are an unusually vital academic community.

Because we are small, when students come here they get personal attention. Under-graduates don't have teaching assistants as instructors, and with very few exceptions they don't sit in classes larger than forty or forty-five. Graduate students usually end up being one of twelve or less and they are not going to have to compete with fifty other graduate students to get resources, assistantships, or even time with faculty. With only three hundred full-time Master's students, everyone gets a lot of personal attention at the graduate level.

Our small size also leads to an unusual vitality, to kinds of cooperative work between faculty and students that is really quite remarkable. The work on Master's theses is a prime example. Because we have such a small faculty, it would be very difficult for most departments to give release time for thesis work, so we don't pay faculty extra--either in money or in time--as other schools do. But we have very few complaints about this extra service, even with some individuals who are perhaps overloaded with thesis work. When I talk to students who have enrolled here and ask what keeps them happy at Western, they usually say it is the interaction with and the quality of the faculty. I believe that the willingness of our graduate faculty to take on thesis work without remuneration is an indication of an unusual dedication and vitality in our faculty as a whole, and I believe it is rare to have such a quality faculty for this sized institution.

Our vitality also shows up in areas where our size could be working against us--in our international programs for example. Although we don't have an unusually large number of international students on campus, we are working in Burkina Faso, Thailand, Jamaica, China, and Swaziland. If faculty are interested in those places, there is an opportunity to get involved. It's not like you have to be here for twenty years to get on the list to go to Jamaica. If you want to go to Jamaica and are teaching something related to the program, we will find a way to get you there. There is an incredible range of activities and interests among the faculty here.

Whatever you are interested in, there's someone else on the faculty you can talk to, and probably someone in a different discipline coming at it from a different perspective. Of course, if you go to Chapel Hill you expect that range and vitality, but what makes Western unique is to have this vitality in programs and faculty at a campus this small.

Of course, when people pose the question of what makes Western unique, one of the first answers to arise is the physical environment, and I would agree with many who feel that we have overplayed the physical environment as a unique element of Western. Nevertheless, when I go around and talk to people about Western, I take the brochure with the beautiful photographs and it always attracts a lot of attention. We perhaps get tired of hearing about how beautiful the area is, but we're jaded because we look at it all of the time. To some degree, it is a part of our uniqueness; but more importantly, our physical environment and our relative isolation perhaps help to create another aspect of our vitality, the sense of community in Cullowhee.

Though I spend a lot of time recruiting graduate students, as the Graduate Dean I also spend time recruiting faculty when candidates visit the campus. What attracts faculty to Western is different from what attracts students. Students may never feel the sense of vitality that comes from our sense of community, but when I interview prospective candidates for faculty positions, it is easy to "sell" Cullowhee because I can tell them that if they come here they are buying into a community, whether they want to or not. Part of this comes from our sense of isolation, but there are other factors as well--for example, the accessibility and relative lack of hierarchy here. You know that if you are working on something and you need to see Jack Wakeley, you can see him. People wander in and out of my office, Jack's office, the Deans' offices, and there is an openness about the place that is, again, remarkable. It gets expressed initially in the interview process through our remarkable hospitality, where people go out of their way to make visitors feel comfortable. This openness is probably related to our size and our sense of isolation, but it is also a product of our intellectual vitality. It is part of our sense of community, our culture. I have never heard anyone sit down and say this is how we do this. It just emerges because of what we are.

But I also believe that we have to verbalize these things to make sure they are noticed, appreciated, and maintained. And I think this is most important with the people who have been here for fifteen to twenty years because they are the most easily disaffected. When you are new and coming in, everything is just great, but the older faculty need to remember why they came here in the first place. They came and they stayed, not because they didn't have options but because this place filled a need for them and those needs are still being met. The basic educational mission at WCU hasn't changed in forty years. We have added some things, but the notion of taking students and graduating them better than when they came in is what we have been doing for a long time. You can't be here and not be interested in improving teaching and being effective in the classroom. That is the bottom line at Western. I tell people when they interview that this is a teaching institution, a community of scholars. Students, often a little under prepared, come here, spend a lot of time with a vibrant faculty, and become better scholars. They may not end up as Rhodes Scholars, but they are scholars, that is, people who can read and make sense of their lives. Whether they spend the rest of their lives reading literature, sociology, or the newspaper, they will spend their lives reading and reflecting, as scholars, and the faculty at WCU is responsible. WCUUnique? Sure it is!

Tony Hickey, Social Work & Sociology, Dean of Research and Graduate Studies

•••••Editor's Call for Responses•••••

If you would like to respond to this opinion piece, please send your comments either to Tony at 250 HFR or to Terry at the FCTE. Please indicate whether you are willing to be quoted or prefer to remain anonymous.

Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

Response to "WCU: Size and Vitality in a Unique Combination,"
by Tony Hickey, 2/1/93

Stephen Airs His Opinion

I found the Hickey piece very disturbing, and I'm sure there are a lot of faculty, staff, and student body members who found it equally shocking but were afraid to respond. Dean Hickey says that when he interviews prospective candidates for faculty positions "it is easy to 'sell' Cullowhee." I think selling Cullowhee, unless it is for a lot of money, is a really bad idea. Why Mr. Hickey thinks that he has the authority to sell Cullowhee is beyond me. Most of us come from families that have been property owners and free, or so we thought, since Jamestown. Mr. Hickey, I am not for sale!

If this sale comes off, how much will each of us get? Will teachers get more than students? Will anyone from the community get to be on t.v.? What should we wear? Will we have to move? Do we get to keep our furniture? Will the new owners let us keep our pets? I have just gotten a new puppy named Buster, who can already sit, and I would

like to take him with us. I, for one, would like to stay in Cullowhee. But if we have to sell, I would like to be on television.

*Stephen Michael Washington,
Furniture Department*

I'm sure Dr. Hickey misspoke himself in his Faculty Forum piece when he said that our students "are scholars, that is, people who can read and make sense of their lives." I have never heard of such a definition and would be offended if it were applied to WCU faculty whom Dr. Hickey describes as "a community of scholars."

Anonymous





Faculty Forum

From the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

Vol. 5, No. 6

March 1, 1993

Illusion Is Not Deep Culture

The last four issues of the *Faculty Forum* have focused on WCU's uniqueness. Bruce Henderson drew the distinction between a community of scholars and a community of scholarship and suggested that we apply the critical thought of scholarship to everything that we do. Mike Malone reported that Western delivers on what it promises and stated that WCU is a place "where competent and caring faculty believe in the importance of teaching." Judy Stillion followed by writing about "deep culture" and listed 12 traits that contribute to WCU's uniqueness. Tony Hickey argued that faculty vitality and our size are what make us unique.

In his 1990 book Narcissistic Process and Corporate Decay, Howard Schwartz develops the idea that some organizations describe themselves in illusive ways and then insist that the illusion is real, thereby ignoring the "real work" of the organization. Schwartz argues that as the illusion moves further away from reality, more and more resources are siphoned off to keep the illusion alive. This increasingly diminishes the attention and energy devoted to the "real work" of the organization and eventually the organization is illusion. NASA, which allowed the *Challenger* tragedy, and the failing General Motors are examples of organizations that became distracted from their "real work" and succumbed to illusion.

Our concern is that the positive things written about valuing teaching and caring for undergraduate students are contributions to an illusion that prevents us from facing facts and taking on the "real work" that is defined in our mission statement. While there are faculty at WCU who value and engage in valuable teaching, at the institutional level we do not value teaching. Furthermore, with a few exceptions, we do not evaluate teaching using accepted and available scholarship. As a result, we have little valid data on whether or not there is excellent teaching, and the assessment of teaching is often impressionistic or occasionally a political judgment. Many faculty know little about the dynamics of the teaching-learning relationship, and the campus reward system (tenure, promotion, merit pay) frequently undervalues exceptional teaching. Furthermore, success in our professional fields is based on cosmopolitan activities like published research, while teaching is always a local activity. The successful teaching and real learning of the average WCU student is a very time-consuming, intense, down-in-the-trench activity that many faculty want

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nothing to do with. We pretend that there is widespread excellent teaching to hide the fact that many faculty have little intention of doing the level and degree of work necessary to teach well.

The important issue, the "deep culture" issue, is that as a community we do not value teaching undergraduate students. Furthermore, it is "against the rules" to deflate the illusion. To do so is to put oneself at risk. This situation is a "double bind," as Chris Argyris puts it, and organizations cannot learn and grow until the double bind is broken. It is imperative for us as a community to identify the situation and get it on our agenda so that we can work toward a solution. Unfortunately, while we may be a community of scholars, we are not a community of scholarship, and the probability of breaking the double bind is weak.

Given that we are stuck in the illusion, how do break out? Amitai Etzioni addresses Communitarianism, a philosophy of the rights and responsibility of living in community. He argues there is too much emphasis on individual rights and we have forgotten our responsibilities to the community. As a result, there is no moral voice. As members of a community of scholarship, we at WCU have a responsibility to speak with our moral voice and by doing so we collectively define the community. The organization should not be defined by the self-enhancing illusion but by community members in scholarly dialogue. Unfortunately, we have few forums in which to use our moral voice and critical thought to challenge the illusion. It may also be hazardous for those individuals who do so. Schwartz explains that those who have accepted the illusion cannot tolerate those who do not because they are a reminder that it is possible to be free. Again, we are caught in the doublebind. We are stuck in the illusion.

Perhaps George Keller's recent visit will help. He said things that members of WCU cannot. Do we have the will to follow through? We can continue the illusion, of course, or we can become a real community of scholarship dedicated to "student-teacher involvement in learning." We can use our moral voice, employ our skills as scholars, and direct our critical thought to challenging the illusion. We have all the talent we need; we just have to have the courage to use it. Are we interested in really living as scholars, demonstrating scholarly values and skills in the way we live in community? Is not hypocrisy the difference between what we say and what we do? One thing for sure, a retreat to narcissism bodes well for no one, ever.

Bill Kane and Terry Kinnear, Management

• • • • • Editor's Call for Responses • • • • •

If you would like to respond to this opinion piece, please send your comments by the 8th of the month either to Bill at 319E Forsyth, to Terry at 319C Forsyth, or to the FCTE. Please indicate whether you are willing to be quoted or prefer to remain anonymous.

Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

Response to "Illusion Is Not Deep Culture,"

by Bill Kane and Terry Kinnear, 3/1/93

Professors Kane and Kinnear do a service in calling into question the Polyannish acceptance of the WCUUnique theme as it relates to our pedagogical milieu. In reality, there is little evidence that our undergraduate learning environment is particularly unique in any meaningful way. During the past 20 years I have taught at three other colleges. My sense is that the general quality of teaching at WCU is about the same as one of those, better than another, and not quite as good as the third. Overt recognition and reward of good teaching was not the variable that differentiated the learning environments of the colleges. If anything, there was less reward for good teaching at the school that most approximated the "community of scholars" ideal that we have heard about ad nauseam over the past year. The school was small and poor, merit pay was non-existent, and there was no teacher-of-the-year award. Classroom competence was simply assumed.

In short, I think that Bill and Terry over-emphasize the importance of the institutional reward system in motivating good teaching. It is nice to occasionally celebrate teaching excellence and recognize its practitioners. However, the moral imperative for doing what we do well ultimately rests upon our individual shoulders as faculty. I suspect that good teachers aspire to excellence because of intrinsic rather than extrinsic rewards such as merit pay and promotion. Institutional acknowledgement, discouragement and encouragement of pedagogy is largely irrelevant, except to the degree that we are obliged to resist administrative policies that interfere with our job.

Hal Herzog, Psychology

Kane and Kinnear are brave to point out our problem with pretentiousness, our collective inability to accept what we are. Too many of us

think we are professors at Research U. or St. Elite. Yet, I am not sure the problem on our campus is purely a question of valuing teaching. We do value it as something that needs to be done well enough that our clients don't complain too loudly about it. That level may not be hard to reach given that our clients are not very discriminating (Why should we expect our students to know what they need?). Moreover, I am not sure I want good teaching to be "rewarded" so much as I want it to be facilitated, appreciated, and, most important, respected.

The other day a colleague told me that he did not see much difference in the nature and range of quality of teaching at Western Carolina in comparison to other places he had taught, including a small college and a large university. He was right. We teach our students here much like those at Penn, Bucknell, UNC-CH, Minnesota, and Furman are taught. We do so in spite of the fact that our students, on average, are much less well prepared than students at those colleges. This is the central illusion that we are living with at WCU. We are either unwilling or unable to admit to ourselves that the teaching behaviors that we were subjected to in our own undergraduate and graduate schools will not work with students with an average SAT of less than 900 and high school class ranks in the middling range. We should not be ashamed of our students, yet neither should we ignore the need to develop new ways to educate them. As Kane and Kinnear have suggested, we need to deal with the problem of our pretentiousness as a community. We need to create new models for working with the particular students we get and to do so from a base in disciplinary and pedagogical scholarship.

Some of our number will not want to deal with reality because it will infringe on their ideal of what college professors should be doing. That will not be an adaptive response in the face of our state's and our society's re-examination of

Responses to Bill Kane and Terry Kinnear

continued

the resources directed at the college sector. If we cannot dispel our illusions, they will be dispelled for us.

Bruce Henderson, Psychology

It is sad that I found Bill Kane and Terry Kinnear's piece, "Illusion Is Not Deep Culture," to be bold. Their article was bold because it challenged us as a community to engage in "scholarly dialogue," to dedicate ourselves to "student-teacher involvement in learning," to admit that we could be doing differently and better. It is sad that such constructive analyses and caring, yet harmless words, must be viewed as bold. It is sad that they had to twice acknowledge that illusion nay-saying is "to put oneself at risk" within our current system.

I applaud their bold assertions and suggest they/we go one step further by identifying specific strategies, specific recommendations to put into concrete action. For example, in their *Faculty Forum* piece, Bill and Terry observed that "we do not evaluate teaching using accepted and available scholarship" but noted no specific methods to do so. We recently heard George Keller call for us to study the process and outcome of the learning that takes place at WCU; is this what Bill and Terry are supporting? Are they supporting Keller's recommendation that "scholarly teaching" (not necessarily publishing) be given greater rewards? If so, what exactly do they, and others, suggest? What tools, at what points, with what costs and rationale?

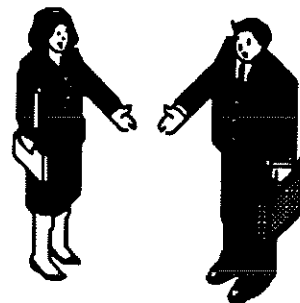
I ask for the specifics--similar to President Clinton's specific 150-point plan to reduce federal spending--so that discussion and debate of the details can begin. I guess I grow weary of talk of talk and talk of illusions, images, and deep culture. Though I am aware of the "double bind" and the needed "paradigm shift," I believe the "real work" is in the details.

Chris Gunn, Counseling & Psychological Services

Well, they are at it again. Professors Kane and Kinnear say that our uniqueness of teaching excellence is probably an illusion. They do, of course, have something of a reputation as disgruntled troublemakers. Read "institutional level" as "administration" and we are on their favorite target, presumably the entity which makes it "hazardous for those individuals" who challenge the illusion. Kane and Kinnear cite George Keller--another negative for some of this community. Mr. Keller is an historical curiosity. He proposes African-American studies! Separate but equal histories long ago went the same way as separate but equal education facilities. This is vintage 1960's. Reduce international activities! This is probably the unconscious isolationism of the Vietnam War generation. The world has moved on since then; we need more, not fewer such activities. Nevertheless, Mr. Keller may have some valid points; even Jeanne Dixon gets a few right each year.

My point is that I sense a tendency to dismiss the Kane-Kinnear essay on what is essentially an ad hominem argument. The subject is too important for that. I suggest that they be invited now to write a clear list of what needs to be changed to get us engaged in our "real work." The why and the how, stated as dispassionately as possible, should accompany the list. Then, without prejudging yes or no, we should thoughtfully consider each point on its merit.

Ellerd Hulbert, History





Faculty Forum

From the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

Vol. 5, No. 7

April 1, 1993

Are We Moving From Shapes To Shadows?

The query before the house this season seems to be: "In how many ways is Western Carolina University unique?" The question is loaded with an assumption, and I would suggest that a question of equal importance is "where do we go from here?" Judy Stillion's **Forum** article was at least suggestive of that query; moreover, in dwelling on extravagant assertions of uniqueness, we could well find that we have moved, as Daniel Boorstin warns, "from shapes to shadows," entering the fogs of self-delusion.

The true challenge to us may be not so much to enumerate the ways in which Western is unique but to establish and as nearly as possible agree upon the essential character of our unique university, those ideals that will guide our future. In that, it is difficult to separate what we are from where we are. Western came to be, after all, because there was a need for educational opportunity in the remote, rural southwestern mountains of North Carolina, and Mr. Madison's school became essential to the filling of that need. In determining what we are, and what we want to be, we need to stay in touch with the rooted need for us, and to assure that we remain essential both to the region in which we are located and to the fulfillment of those academic ideals that we establish. The wisdom of establishing an essential place and role that only we can fill and play would soon become apparent if there were to be a scaled-down system of higher education in North Carolina.

We have, in times past, given collective thought to the essence of what we should be, and what we would like to be known for. We have, before, acknowledged that institutional mission -- perhaps, even, survival -- rests on an identity decision, defined both by what we are and what we are not, but most of all by what we would become. Historically, Western's faculty and administration, at crucial turning points, have joined to examine the issue of "where we go from here," and on the answers built enduring strengths.

Young Bobby Madison (he was 22) had a simple idea, an ideal, if you please, and on it built a school. He knew what he wanted his school to be when it grew up: a normal school for the preparation of teachers. It was a simple, strong, enduring ideal.

In 1951, that normal school, still a teachers college, faced the question: Where do we want to go from here? What do we want to be? That question was placed in the hands of the faculty Institutional Research Committee which entitled its 1952 report, "Where From Here?" On its recommendations Western took a new name, broadened degree studies in the liberal arts, sciences, and business, formalized graduate studies, and reinforced a public service commitment, all of which guided institutional fortunes specifically for the next fifteen years and exert strong influence even today. It was a strong, enduring ideal.

In 1965, Western again was asking, where do we go from here? And Paul Reid, who had returned for a second term as president, put the matter in the hands of a faculty group, pragmatically dubbed the "Where From Here?" committee. Its report, "Horizon 1980," laid a

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foundation for reorganizing the academic structure of the institution and for seeking and obtaining university status. It was a strong, enduring, focussing ideal.

Institutional image, in each instance, was the consequence of strong ideals, suggesting today that our image will continue to be the result of our ideals. If, to take as example a current point of discussion, we do not wish to be known as a place that affords educational opportunity to high school graduates who, in our congregation of them, have average SAT scores in the 800 block, then our academic ideals must not include offering that opportunity.

If, on the other hand, making that door of opportunity available is a Western ideal, and will continue to be our practice as well as our policy, then that practice undoubtedly will continue to be a major part of our image because no institution's image is greatly different from its reality. In our current set of goals, we list first the improvement of our quality, a strong ideal. In seeking to reflect an image, it is to that reality that we hold the mirror, and as we are beginning to see, the better the reality the better the reflection.

In his little book, The Image: A Guide To Pseudo-Events In America, (recommended reading) Boorstin laments that "the language of images is everywhere. Everywhere it has displaced the language of ideals....In discussing ourselves, our communities, our nation, our leaders, ourselves, we talk the language of images...." That language, he says, is a "devious, circumlocutory way of talking (that) has become common. We do not even notice it. In an earlier age critics would have objected simply that universities failed to pursue this ideal or that ideal. But today universities, like other institutions -- in fact like everybody -- are judged by whether they fit into a well-tailored 'image' of themselves."

In that context, have we in our current discussions become overly engrossed with accusatory self-flagellation on the one hand and autogenously hypnotic exultation on the other? At times, both those camps seem to have followers, and while the resulting dialogue is healthy, do we sometimes fail in our exchanges to distinguish between what is descriptive and what is prescriptive, between what we are and what some wish we were?

Most of us, I expect, want our reach to go well beyond our grasp, but Boorstin may have had it right when he cautioned that Americans "are ruled by extravagant expectations." We have, he says, "unprecedented opportunity to deceive ourselves and to befog our experience...we want and believe these illusions because we suffer from extravagant expectations....our expectations are extravagant in the precise dictionary sense of the word -- 'going beyond the limits of reason or moderation.' They are excessive."

Could it be that we are engaged, wittingly or not, once more in searching for realistic and reasonable ideals by which to shape our reality? If that is so, we need worry little about uniqueness, image, or the future; only in the lack of ideals would we have cause for enduring concern.

Doug Reed, Director of Public Information

• • • • • **Editor's Call for Responses** • • • • •

If you would like to respond to this opinion piece, please send your comments by the 8th of the month either to Doug at 423 HFR or to the FCTE. Please indicate whether you are willing to be quoted or prefer to remain anonymous.

Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

Response to "Are We Moving From Shapes To Shadows?,"

by Doug Reed, 4/1/93

In recent Forum issues we have speculated on what is illusion and on what might be reality. Kane and Kinnear tell us that an illusion of what we would be has been constructed for us and that we must beware that the gap between our reality and that illusion does not swallow us whole. Doug Reed suggests that perhaps we are merely engaged in a search for new ideals to guide our future growth and direction.

But perhaps all of this speculation on what we should call what we're doing is less important than how industriously we work, especially how we work at anything pertinent to the university as a whole. Perhaps we should consider that the only difference between an illusion and an ideal is our commitment to the work needed to achieve the suggested result.

We each have areas of our academic and professional lives about which we feel intense passion. For some it is the classroom, for some the research lab, and for some the primary interest has shifted toward service to the university or the community. It is easy to become fully absorbed in that about which we feel passionate, but as George Keller reminded us the university does not merely exist to make the faculty happy. The rest of the work must be done, too, and it must be done by us. We are burdened but also blessed to work in an institution in which we can influence so many of the directions we choose for ourselves. It is time now, as it has always been and always will be, for us to roll up our sleeves, loosen our ties, decide which pieces of the illusion we want to make our ideals, and then make them happen.

Nory Prochaska, Mathematics and Computer Science



Faculty Forum

From the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

Vol. 5, No. 8

May 1, 1993

The True Heroes

Western Carolina University is but a tiny dot on a map containing thousands of other institutions of higher education across the country. What makes that dot slightly brighter than the others in the eyes of Western students and alumni? In simpler terms, what makes WCU unique? I believe it is the faculty. This is not necessarily because most of the faculty have earned doctorate degrees or because of their willingness to trudge to work through snowstorms but because they truly care about their students.

If I were to randomly survey citizens across the United States, the majority would have heard of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill while only a few would recognize the name Western Carolina University. The reason for this might be Chapel Hill's excellent and well-known athletic program or because of its size and high rate of out-of-state attendance. But with apologies to all those who hum the tune of the Tarheel alma mater, aside from all the NCAA fame and glitter, it is possible that student faculty relationships there rank an extremely distant second to those at WCU. For example, a high school friend who attends UNC-CH recently visited me during her spring break. She told me that after returning for the spring semester she had made an appointment with the history professor with whom she had received a grade of C instead of her expected grade of A. When she arrived to inquire about the surprise grade, the professor was sitting with his feet lounged across his desk, smoking a pipe and reading a book. As she explained her situation, the professor did not once alter his position or shift his eyes from his book. After five minutes of this so-called interaction she frantically asked, "Are you even listening to me?" Without looking up he responded, "I grade as I see fit and your grade stands as is." Needless to say, she was very hurt and distraught by the professor's lack of interest in student affairs. I was very proud and happy to tell her that I had never had an encounter like hers with a faculty member at WCU and did not anticipate ever having one. Even though WCU's basketball team has never been declared National Champions, I don't think you'll ever find another school where the faculty cares as much about its present and former students.

Obviously, WCU's faculty is not the only faculty which cares about its students, but there are probably few faculties that care to the degree or depth of WCU's faculty. Teachers at every

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school ask students to learn assigned material and fulfill class objectives and many professors try to incorporate education about real life into their daily curriculum in order to benefit the student, but the WCU faculty is not only committed to student achievement inside the classroom; it is also concerned about the student's life outside of the classroom. The students of WCU deeply respect their teachers and are not afraid to ask for their help regarding personal matters. I believe that every student at WCU has at least one teacher whom he/she thinks of as a mentor and/or friend. I know this because I personally have a wonderful instructor whom I view as a figure who will remain an intellectual and emotional support during my period of personal and intellectual growth at the university. I am assured that he is willing to help me, or any of his students, with any problem we might endeavor during our stay in Cullowhee. I am certain that many other students feel the same because I have seen them chatting with professors after class, stopping teachers in the hall, and conversing with them over lunch. These examples show the faculty's interest in the students and their willingness to be accessible.

Since students feel they can confide in faculty members, a teacher at WCU cannot predict what a student will ask him/her next. As a result of the closeness between the students and faculty, not only traditional questions about homework are answered by the faculty. Questions range from "how do I get to the telephone company in Sylva," to "I think I have a drug problem, where can I get help?" Problems which a student might come to a teacher with range from ways to confront an unfaithful significant other in a relationship, finding the best school to transfer to in a particular field, or thoughts of dropping out of school because of the lack of a feeling of direction. By answering these questions, a member of the WCU faculty willingly takes on the roles of instructor, adviser, counselor, mentor, friend, Mom/Dad, and information bank. This characteristic is important to the adjustment and well-being of the student and can be readily found among the ranks of professors at WCU, perhaps to an extent that is truly unique in higher education.

While the main purpose of this essay has been to define and explain the factor which makes WCU unique, it is also commendation for those special teachers about whom I have written. It is offered as a small reward for their dedication, just in case student smiles and thank-you's are slightly too sparse or sporadic. But this essay is also an effort to inspire those teachers who have "given-up" because of student apathy. I would like to remind them that even though they may not always hear the praise which they deserve, the students at WCU do appreciate their involvement and value their advice--today, tomorrow, and far into the future.

Sarah Floyd, Freshman